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Philosophy of Education

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I often think of the person I have become as the person who tried to be as different as he possibly could be from the people around him. I was always supported by family and friends but I always felt as if I focused on the negatives of some of those people and tried to avoid those traits whenever possible. The result being the person I am today. Since joining the education program and constantly being told to think about who I am and my personal philosophy of education, I have never spent more time thinking about the kind of person I am. Not only that, but I have also spent a lot of time thinking about what other people see me as. Especially when I am in a classroom, I am constantly thinking about what the students think of me and how I am doing as a teacher.

All that being said, I find myself to be a very entertaining person and an even more entertaining teacher. I have always believed that if the students are enjoying your class, they are going to get more out of it. Putting my students is something that I cannot help. I want them to succeed. More than that, I want them to want to succeed and enjoy doing it along the way. In the end, it is my own experiences in life that will shape how my students are taught and it is those experiences that will help me be the successful teacher I know I can be.

More than just in the classroom, I teach health and healthy behaviors whenever I get the chance. However, my content area extends beyond just anatomy and physiology and other health related instruction. In my classroom, I teach skills that are used and reused throughout the many years of a person's life. I teach students to feel comfortable and confident in who they are and whatever they are passionate about. In fact, I use those things to interest them further in the curriculum. The skills I teach students are related to health but can be used across multiple content areas. Things like, how to give a presentation without being nervous or what you can do before a big exam to better prepare your mind and body. Earning respect and being respectful to your teacher and fellow students is an important part of my curriculum. Students will find that if they want to get anywhere with me, it needs to be approached in a respectful manner because that is how things are done in the world outside of school. It is through kindness and respect that I teach my students these skills, as well as a healthy handful of humor.

My method of teaching involves a lot of role modeling. Students should see their teacher practicing everything that they teach. I do my best to model everything that I teach my students because if they do not see me doing it or hear about me doing it, how likely are they to practice those skills? Too often I see health teachers that are overweight or exhibit an aura of unhealthiness, whether that is modeling laziness or poor nutrition, among other things. I want to students to come to me for answers about diets and fitness. I want them to know that I have all the answers, not because I went to school and learned it all but because I spent the time to work on each aspect of health. I want students to know me and my lifestyle from the first day of class. Each year I plan to create a slideshow of different things I have experienced in my life so that every student knows the person that will be teaching them throughout the course of their class. It will be my own personal resume to my students.

Aside from role modeling, my curriculum will be building towards making each student feel comfortable in the class. Health can be a touchy subject to some students because of the different topics that arise throughout the class. Regardless of personal experiences, the majority of students feel uncomfortable when it comes to sexual education, especially depending on what age group is being taught the material. The first day of class is spent getting to know one another through fun and silly games. From there the curriculum will grow towards more and more sensitive topics. At any point a student may feel uncomfortable with the material, whether we are talking about obesity, mental illness, suicide, or some other topic, students will know that they are in a safe environment. Getting to know the school’s guidance counselors will be priority with my job as a teacher so that I may be able to refer students to them whenever I see it necessary. I would also plan to have a school counselor come in to give a presentation so that students feel comfortable with them as well.

I have spent a lot time thinking about what age group I would be best suited for teaching and I have taught in many different age groups. It is my opinion that it is the middle school years that are the toughest to teach students these skills. Their bodies are starting to go through all sorts of changes and they have many new things racing through their minds. Things like extra school work, sports, more responsibility, or the opposite sex are just a few to name that many students have not experienced before. They are in uncharted territory and each of them has their own way of handling it, whether it is good or bad. I think it is this age that health may be such an important topic to them. They are just starting to be influenced by things they see around them. Ads on the television are targeting them, they are getting computers when they get to school, they are old enough to view certain movies or television shows and they are starting to form their own views of the world and people around them.

I have had a lot of fun teaching the middle school aged students because I know how important it is to them. I have also taught a fair amount of high school students. This age group is still important for health because you can always go deeper into this content and students can always get more out of it. Furthermore, students are typically more responsible in high school and may retain the information better or at least take it more seriously. With both age groups, repetition is important. There are so many important things with health and often you will see the health teachers from the high school and middle school working together to build a curriculum that works for the students in a very comprehensive way.

I see benefits to teaching in both age groups although I still have not decided which I would be best suited for because I have had good experiences with both. This is particularly nice because it means I can be less picky about where to work when I am job hunting. I think I would generally prefer to work with high school students because you can do so much with them and the level of maturity will also be a benefit to the classroom when it comes to more sensitive subjects.

For a very long time, I did not consider being a teacher to be an option for me. It had never crossed my mind. Even when I got into college I wanted to be a psychologist because someone in my family was very successful at it and made a lot of money. It was not the best reason for wanting to go to college but I had not even decided to go to college until I just happened to get into all the schools I applied for. It was not until I worked at a summer camp as a counselor that I realized how good I was with kids. Without even trying I could earn of respect of all the kids at the camp and worked well with each of them. Eventually I was promoted to sports director of the camp. Unexpectedly I found myself very interested in teaching healthy life choices to kids. I did not even know until then how much I payed attention in health and physical education class. I was able to offer advice to campers about health-related topics and they trusted me and told me how much they appreciated it. After that summer, I had a college course called Environmental Geoscience. I was talking with the professor in his office and told him about the work I did and he referred me to the education department. Before I knew it, that professor set me on a course that would become my future.

Throughout this course (EDU 402) we have had many readings that I have found interesting. One of the most interesting books that we have read is teaching hope. This is a reading that is made up of many teachers and their stories throughout the years in their classrooms. Some of the stories are full of hope and students achieving their goals. Some of the stories however, have ended negatively for either the students or the teacher. It has been these stories that have had the biggest impact on me. Some of the stories are of students who have come from nothing and tried so hard and right when you think they are going to succeed, something goes wrong and they fail in the end. Those stories, while sad, made me think about the impact we have on students whether it is positive or negative. In one story, even after the student failed, the teacher did not give up and pushed the student in the right direction towards success. Too often I have seen teachers write off students within the first class. In their mind, that student has already failed the course and will not succeed. So why is that student worth their time? As a result, that student receives no support when it is that student that needs it the most.

No matter how far gone a student may seem, I believe that a teacher should never give up on them. A part of me understands the reasoning behind giving up on those students. Teachers have to deal with million things a day that leaves them exhausted and stressed. They deal with students, grading, administration, parents, and additional courses to keep their certification up to date. They do all of this while being amazingly underpaid. It makes complete sense why many of my professors have said, “if you do not absolutely love teaching, then you shouldn’t be doing it.” You have to be willing to go the extra mile without a lot return on your work. You may help a student succeed and never receive a single thank you from anyone and that has to be enough. If it’s not then you’ll be in for rough ride.

Teachers today are overworked and underpaid. Over the past year and a half, I have done practicum, student teaching and a whole lot of substitute teaching. No matter where I went I encountered the same problem. I especially noticed this certain problem in student teaching and substitute teaching. There are not enough substitutes or ed techs. Whatever school I went to, they were always shuffling teachers, subs, and ed techs around trying to get coverage in each classroom. It all comes down to budget cuts and there being a lack of money in education right now, especially in public education. For some reason, it is not seen as a top priority and as a result we have understaffed and underpaid schools throughout the country. The powers that be think that they are saving a lot of money with these budget cuts when every person who has studied that matter says that in the long run we will get a huge return if we invest in the youth of the country early on and make sure that they have a proper education and resources available to them.

The second issue I have personally noticed, is too many older teachers doing things the old way. While student teaching I came across a few teachers that just did not want to change the way they did things because they have been teaching the same way for so long already. I was in a meeting with all of the teachers during student teaching and I heard the oldest teacher say that she was not going to change a thing she does because she was going to retire in a couple of years so it didn’t matter. It really stung me to hear that because she did not even consider how that thinking would affect the students in her classes. She did not stop to consider it for a second and it is because of that moment that I realized this problem that I never considered before. We are already working in colleges to fix this problem though. I cannot tell you how many times a professor has told me that teachers need to be lifelong learners because things will change throughout the years. I do not imagine that was ever said to this elderly teacher.

There are a whole lot of philosophies about education that philosophers have come up with throughout the years. The educational philosophy that I identify with the most is constructivism. This deals with hands-on activity based learning. From my time working at a summer camp, I have picked up a lot of team building activities that are fun and interactive, while being directly related to my content area. I prefer this philosophy because I like to get my students up and moving around. During student teaching, we focused on making the curriculum all skills-based. My mentor teacher and I wanted the students to practice the things we were teaching them so we would try to come up with as many activities as we could to get the students more involved. This resulted in the students being able to physically go through the motions of something like, learning how to properly store and open a condom. Something that seems simple, but a small mistake can make it ineffective during the actual act.

Confucius focused on the morality of education and how the two should be inseparable. He saw the role of teachers as inspiring students with truths of great ideas. As a health teacher, I have a moral obligation to share my knowledge about how the human body works and what it needs to be healthy, to help all my students. I want to inspire them to lead healthy lives and show them the possibility of a world free of preventable diseases. Socrates was all about asking the right questions to help develop students mind. He wanted them to come to the answer on their own. This is a technique that I have seen in many classrooms when teachers are trying to edge students in the right direction, whether they are close to the answer or far from it. I must say that agree with this method because it gives students a chance to find the answer for themselves rather than having it given to them. It brings a reward to working through the problem. Between Confucius and Socrates, I think they make up most of what I believe in as an educator, while at the same time, showing me that many of the teachers I have enjoyed in school over my lifetime have used elements from both of these philosophies.

I have been in many classrooms and I decided that I would take elements from each of them to form my own environment. When students walk in, I want them to know they are in the health room. I want to have posters related to health and its many topics as well as pictures of me and my life. I want the students to see little bits of my life experiences so they can build a more personal connection with me. The desks will be set up in a U shape. I want all of the students to be able to see one another while at the same time eliminating groups of three or four students from gathering together and being disruptive. This desk arrangement will make it easy to keep students separated that need it. I have not decided where my desk would go in the classroom and honestly I am not sure if I want a teacher’s desk. I never liked the idea of the teacher having their own spot in a corner of a room somewhere because I was sometimes intimidated when I had to talk to a teacher at their desk. A desk would be nice for grading and keeping my things but I think by the time I have a job of my own I will explore different options until I find something that feels right to me.

In my life, I have always been motivated by the next step in my life. I do not always want to be a health teacher. That is just the first part in my plan. At some point I would love to become and athletic director and vice principal. I like taking on challenging roles and I have always liked moving up on the ladder employment. The next step after that would be try and become a principle or after I have taken enough classes and got my masters, I could teach college courses. I know that all of this is only possible if I do well from the start. I think I will be able to be a great teacher because I am also motivated by my students. Seeing my students succeed is always a rewarding feeling because it means that I was able to do my job effectively and they were able to take something away from it.

My content area and how I teach it will be constantly developing. I have always loved to go to conferences and each year they come out with better ways of teaching something. More than that, they are always revealing some sort of new technology that revolutionizes the teaching industry. Whether that technology is a smart board or a laptop for each student, technology is something that belongs in a classroom because it is a language in its own right. Of course, all of the newest technology is expensive and a school district will not always be willing to pay for the newest inventions. This is where my own history in grant writing will come in handy. As a community health major as well, we are required to take a grant writing course and write our own professional grant. I was able to learn all of the ins and outs of making a successful grant from scratch. It will be this experience that I hope will be able to supply me with all of the resources I will need for my classroom throughout the years.

Assessment has changed over the years and while many schools are adopting the standards based assessment, not all of them are doing the same thing. I have had experience in both scenarios and it really depends on the direction the district goes in. It is a big adjustment to change the entire way things are run in a district. It can be an expensive decision that will not pay off if it is not executed correctly. I visited a school I was interested in working at and I learned that they did not even have report cards the last semester because they were sure how to do it on their new system. It is a big learning curve that not everyone has figured out yet and there is not just one system that everyone can turn to. It seems that everyone is trying to make their own variation of the standards based system.

I mentioned earlier that I wanted my classroom to be a healthy and safe environment where students feel comfortable talking about anything. It is so important in a health class for students to be open to new ideas and learning the content. If students are unsettled and nervous to talk in class, they probably will not learn as much as they could have. They should be focused on the class activities and participation rather than something or someone that is bothering them at school. I want it to be a breath of fresh air when they walk into my classroom. Ideally I would like each student to look forward to their health class and sign up for any elective classes that I am teaching so they will get more out of the program I create.

In the end, my main goal is for everyone to see me giving it my all when it comes to teaching. My hope is that students and other teachers will be inspired by how much I put into my teaching and will try just as hard in anything that they do. Whatever school district I work in, I want to be the go to person people come to for advice about teaching, or classroom management, or a health program in another school they are working on. I want to contribute as much as I can to the school district and in doing so it will hopefully create other teachers with the same goals and ideals that I have. Wherever I go, I want to leave it better than I found it.